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ABSTRACT

Causes for the low representation of females in school administrative positions are considered in this study, which focused specifically on two areas: the frustration and acceptance factors. The frustration factor relates to the sense of futility felt when applying for an administrative position. The acceptance factor relates to those females who have accepted the societal stereotype that they are not worthy of administration positions. After establishing a hypothesis, a questionnaire was given to 71 undergraduate education female students from a large Northeastern university. Results indicate that the frustration and acceptance factors play a major role in deterring females from applying for school administration roles. The reluctance to consider an administration career is related to their perception that hiring practices are biased and school boards structure their hiring practices to secure male administrators. Appended are 12 references. (SI)

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Barriers to Administration as Perceived by Undergraduate Female Education Majors

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Barriers to Administration as Perceived by Undergraduate Female Education Majors

Historically, education in general and teaching in particular has been viewed as 'women's work.' School boards have fostered this view as a means of providing quality education at a low cost. This attitude generates an atmosphere where females are treated as economic capital. Additionally, this environment has been structured to overtly and covertly coerce females to accept negative working conditions. For example, the teacher's school day and year meets the needs of those females who want to work and yet remain home with their children. Hence, many females readily accept a lower salary in order to fulfill other role expectations.

By contrast, males have moved rapidly through the teaching ranks and into administrative positions. This rise can be attributed, in part, to societal stereotypes that imply males make better leaders and deserve higher salaries. These myths have facilitated male advancement in public school administration positions while restraining females in traditional teaching roles.

Females have not always had low membership in public school administrative roles. The number of female elementary principals reached a high of 55 percent in 1921. Yet, even this majority percentage was not proportional to their teaching membership[1]. Female administrative membership rapidly declined after 1950 giving males an exclusive hold on public school administration[2].

During the last decade a trend developed indicating an increase in the number of female administrators. This trend indicates a retrenchment of the traditional, male dominated school organizational structure. Ironically, this has occurred during a period where there was a greater public awareness of gender issues and where women seemed to be making inroads into traditionally male dominated careers. This trend seems to have disappeared[3].

The causes for the disproportionately low representation of females in school administrative positions

are numerous and complex. They include: societal stereotyping[4], male dominated organizational structures[5], gender bias in hiring practices[6], economic practices, lack of networking possibilities, small number of female applications and limited role models[7], lack of mobility[8], failure to assume androgynous characteristics[9] and lower career aspirations for administrative positions[10].

Two areas not considered are the 'Frustration Factor' and the 'Acceptance Factor.' The Frustration Factor relates to the sense of futility felt when applying for an administrative position. Where the Frustration Factor is high, females may perceive that hiring decisions are based on gender rather than ability. Consequently, fewer females may apply. The Acceptance Factor relates to those females who have accepted the societal stereotype that they are not worthy of administration positions. As a result, their actions serve to reinforce existing prejudice and consequently hamper the ambitions of qualified females[11]. The number of females who are affected by the Acceptance Factor may range as high as 65 percent[12].

To examine the existence of the frustration and acceptance factors, this study hypothesized that pre career (undergraduate education majors) females have a strong desire to seek careers in school administration, but

perceive women to be victims of gender bias in hiring practices. As a result they do not pursue administrative positions because they are not willing to risk rejection, waste time or expend energy in a futile job search. It was further hypothesized, that a significant minority of women contribute to societal stereotyping by supporting the premise that administration is 'man's work.' As a result, they do not see it as an appropriate area where women can compete as effectively or successfully as males.

Method

To test these hypotheses, 71 undergraduate female students from a large Northeastern university, all majoring in education, and expressing a desire to graduate with a major in elementary education, were given a questionnaire that measured attitudes toward educational administration. The instrument, of original design, was developed to elicit responses in the following categories: does the subject believe that there is a preconceived bias toward female candidates for administrative positions; does the subject believe that females and males have comparable administrative skills; and, does the subject believe that the 'women's place' is in the classroom and not administration. The questionnaire was scored on a five

point likert-type scale, with subjects being allowed to strongly agree, agree, remain undecided, disagree or strongly disagree.

Results and Discussion

These results strongly indicate that the Frustration and Acceptance Factors play a major role in deterring females from applying for school administration roles. Although these subjects unanimously believe both genders can be successful as administrators, only 27 percent of the subjects evidence any desire to become a school administrator. This reluctance to consider administration as a potential career is related to their perception that hiring practices are biased and school boards structure their hiring practices to secure male administrators. Forty nine percent believe that bias exists, while only a small minority feel that bias does not exist (See Table 1). Male bias is perceived as extending beyond hiring conditions and affecting administrative evaluations. Only 19 percent of the subjects disagree with the statement that male administrators are evaluated higher than females.

It is apparent that many of these females feel frustrated in light of their perception of existing bias since they contend that administrative tasks such as student

discipline, budget management and development, and conflict resolution requires skills that are not gender specific. Males and females are viewed as equally skilled and capable of handling a variety of school issues. These subjects, although exuding confidence, acknowledge the existence of the Frustration Factor. They believe that the organization operates with biased attitudes concerning potential female administrative candidates.

Although a large percentage of females assert that gender is not an issue in skill acquisition, they are compromised by the feelings of a number of their peers who believe the opposite. For example, 16 percent believe that males can develop and manage a large school budget better than females and 18 percent believe that males use less emotion than females during stress situations. These conditions support the existence of the Acceptance Factor. The Acceptance Factor is a major influence in the lives of a number of these subjects. These females believe that males are more competent than females in managing certain administrative tasks. It seems that these females have fallen victim to accepting traditional sexual stereotyping patterns.

These findings place females in a 'no win' situation. On one hand, there is a desire to be a school administrator,

but a strong perception that entry will be denied because of gender bias. On the other hand, there are a number of females who feel that female educators are inferior to males in terms of administrative competence.

As teachers, both of these groups present mixed messages to their students. - These messages include: hard work and skill can not overcome existing prejudice and females have predestined roles which exclude leadership.

These conditions must be eradicated. Educational institutions have a primary responsibility to exert leadership to encourage and recruit qualified females as school administrators. They must eliminate attitudes that pre select career options while generating a climate of equal opportunity. Female teachers and students must perceive that career opportunity is based on ability not gender. Failure by public educational institutions to assert themselves in behalf of equal opportunity for females will result in a growing sense of frustration and alienation from society.

Teaching is not exclusively 'women's work' nor is leadership exclusively 'man's domain.' Good teachers and leaders are essential to the survival of any society. The active assertion by educational institutions that hiring and promotion policies be formulated on a genderless basis is essential if schools are to be models for young people in particular and society in general.

Table 1

Female Perception of School Administration

		A	U	D*
1.	I would like to be a school administrator.	27	52	21
2.	I believe that females are as capable as males to becoming successful administrators.	100	0	0
3.	Most school boards prefer male principals.	49	25	26
4.	Male school administrators are evaluated higher than female administrators.	38	43	19
5.	Female administrators can't handle discipline problems as well as males.	7	7	86
6.	Female principals have better communication skills than male principals.	18	23	59
7.	Male administrators are more adept at dealing with angry parents.	6	20	74
8.	Male administrators use less emotion than females during stress situations.	18	24	58
9.	I would rather work for a female administrator.	14	65	21
10.	I would rather work for a male administrator.	1	73	26
11.	Gender bias exists in school board hiring practices.	48	42	10
12.	I wouldn't want to be the only female administrator in a school district.	13	17	80
13.	Male administrators develop and manage a large school budget better than female administrators.	16	17	67
14.	School administration is more a male than a female career.	13	16	71

* A: percent agreeing with the statement.
  U: percent undecided about the statement.
  D: percent disagreeing with the statement.

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